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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9733
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE
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UNCLAS SAN SALVADOR 000796

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

FOR PM/DTCC - BLUE LANTERN COORDINATOR

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TAGS: ETTC KOMC ES
SUBJECT: BLUE LANTERN 050097338

REF: A. SECSTATE 44775
1B. TITUS-BALLARD 6/6/08 EMAIL

¶1. (SBU) In response to reftel request, Emboffs June 5 visited the main office of Tiros Cobra. We met with his General Manager Yanira Elizabeth de Melara. She was very knowledgeable about the company. Though unable to immediately locate some of the company records, she provided them to us the following day. Those records appeared to be in order.

¶2. (SBU) Tiros Cobra previously imported munitions under the name of Expocafe, owner Rene Llort Fernandez's original company. Expocafe originally exported coffee, the family's traditional business. According to Ms. Melara, they have been importing munitions since 1989. Last year (2007) they allowed Expocafe's corporate status to go inactive and did not renew its arms import license. Tiros Cobra is the only entity now owned by Mr. Llort that is licensed by the Ministry of Defense to import arms. The General Manager acknowledged that it was a mistake to have import licenses under both Expocafe and Tiros Cobra. Tiros Cobra received a new one-year import license on December 13, 2007.

¶3. (SBU) Rene Llort is an agronomical engineer and is 64 years of age. His son, Christopher Llort (age 24) is another shareholder of the company, but Christopher Llort works for the Salvadoran government in the office of the Local Development Social Fund and is not active in Tiros Cobra.

¶4. (U) Tiros Cobra was founded in 2002. They began selling munitions about two years ago. They have eight branches throughout El Salvador. At their headquarters, where we visited, they do not sell many munitions and it is used mostly as a distribution center. They sell mostly to security companies and some independent purchasers. Anyone who buys munitions must provide their national identification card (called a DUI) and the transaction is recorded. The Ministry of Defense does quarterly audits of the books and the General Manager said they do monthly audits of their branches.

¶5. (SBU) It is clear that Tiros Cobra is an established business. Though, we did not go to the eight branches spread throughout the country. The fact that they acknowledged the confusion created by their having two import permits, admitted it was a mistake and stated that they never tried to import more than the limit of 100,000 cartridges per caliber imposed by Salvadoran law are also indications of their bona fides.

GLAZER